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DEPT FOR NEA/ARP AMACDONALD, INR SMOFFATT AND S/CT

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [MARR](#) [MCAP](#) [PHSA](#) [PINS](#) [PTER](#) [MOPS](#) [OTRA](#) [YM](#)
SUBJECT: SALEH TELLS PETRAEUS: "NO RESTRICTIONS" ON CT
COOPERATION

REF: 08 SANAA 1947

Classified By: Ambassador Stephen Seche for reasons 1.4(b) and (d).

¶1. (S) SUMMARY. During Commander of the U.S. Central Command General David Petraeus' second visit to Yemen on July 26, President Saleh stated that no restrictions or conditions would be placed on the USG-ROYG CT partnership. The President also agreed to increase the tempo of military training and assistance. He continued to downplay the severity of challenges to the regime such as the Houthi rebels and the separatist Southern Movement. Saleh's renewed commitment to jointly confront al-Qaeda will be tested in the coming months as other domestic challenges compete for his attention, and that of the nation's security services. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (S) In an hour-long meeting at the Presidential Palace in Sana'a on July 26, President Saleh promised CENTCOM Commander General David Petraeus full counter-terrorism cooperation "without restrictions or conditions," including pursuing al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP). Saleh called AQAP "a dangerous poison" and an "epidemic" and said the ROYG was committed to hunting down terrorists in Jawf, Sa'ada, Marib, Abyan and Hadramout governorates. The President explained that the postponement of parliamentary elections scheduled for April gave him more room to maneuver against AQAP, without worrying about criticism from the opposition parties. He also asked for increased information-sharing with the USG in order to better target AQAP's leaders.

¶3. (S) Saleh began his assessment of the overall political and economic situation with the south, stating that the situation was similar to 1994, except now the Southern Movement is cooperating with AQAP. According to Saleh, former pro-government jihadi Tariq al-Fadhli, who switched camps in April to support the Southern Movement, recruited six AQAP leaders to join him. He said that the ROYG would take "appropriate measures to eliminate (jihadists in the Southern Movement) at the appropriate time." In a later meeting with General Petraeus, Minister of Interior Mutaheer Rashad al-Masri called the movement "a small number of people with loud voices." Turning to the Houthi rebels, Saleh repeated the ROYG's commitment to the July 2008 ceasefire, adding that the Houthis' "daily attacks" did not diminish the ROYG's control. Masri also assured the General that the ROYG was upholding the ceasefire. Saleh said the USG should convince the Gulf states to open their labor markets to Yemeni workers and increase investment in Yemen, which would help stabilize the country. "Leadership can come and go, but the stability of Yemen is most important," he said. Touching on Somalia, the President urged the USG to increase its support to the Transitional Federal Government (TFG) as well as consider preemptive strikes against pirate vessels.

14. (S) General Petraeus, President Saleh and the Yemeni military agreed to increase the tempo of cooperation and training, with the goal of enabling ROYG forces to independently conduct CT operations and secure Yemen's borders. President Saleh, Yemeni Air Force (YAF) Commander Muhammad Saleh al-Ahmar and Republican Guard Commander Ahmed Ali Abdullah Saleh all responded positively to Gen. Petraeus, suggestion that Yemen,s military take advantage of training opportunities at the King Abdullah Special Operations Training Center in Amman and the al-Dhafra Air Warfare Center in the United Arab Emirates. Masri told the General that there had been delays in the establishment of four previously discussed governorate-based Counter-Terrorism Unit (CTU) posts, and once again requested USG support for this initiative. General Petraeus told his interlocutors that SOCCENT Commander General Cleveland will visit Yemen again soon to discuss CT cooperation in detail. He also confirmed that 25 M-113 armored personnel vehicles should be en route from Jordan presently, which prompted President Saleh to assert that he had been promised 100 of the vehicles. Minister of Defense Muhammad Nasser Ahmed told the CENTCOM Commander that in the last two months, the Yemeni Coast Guard (YCG) and Yemeni Navy (YNAV) have thwarted a number of pirate attacks and are implementing a strategic counter-piracy plan. "We all need to work together to control international waters," Ahmed said.

PRESIDENTIAL HEALTH UPDATE

15. (S) The President, who was recently treated for "bruises" sustained on July 21, reportedly after a spill while mountain biking, was alert and engaged, if somewhat subdued, during

the meeting. Removing his sunglasses half-way through the meeting, he revealed a nasty bruise under his left eye. His left hand was cut, and he moved his left arm infrequently and stiffly.

COMMENT

16. (S) Saleh,s strong expression of support for joint CT cooperation against AQAP leadership figures may reflect an increasing awareness on his part that the terrorist presence in Yemen is metastasizing and that, as it does, the threat it poses to his regime and his own personal security grows, as well. While he acknowledged that he had called off a previous cooperative effort because of domestic political pressure related to the now-postponed April Parliamentary elections, he insisted that this time around there would be no second thoughts. His commitment, however, will soon be tested, as ongoing challenges from the Houthis and the Southern Movement, combined with a failing economy, continue to demand his attention and, just as likely, that of the nation,s security services. END COMMENT.

17. General Petraeus did not clear on this cable.

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